

# PUBLIC THEOLOGY 1: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CRISES

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## **Course Description:**

Post-Enlightenment thinkers had long predicted the disappearance of faith and religion from developed societies. But this disappearance never occurred. Instead, we have seen the reawakening of religion in the public sphere, and the resurgence of religious views across all areas of public life. While several of these religious resurgences have been strongly negative (ranging from religiously infused prejudice and racism through to terrorism), there has also been a reawakening regarding the positive power of faith to shape societies and to concretely enhance life.

Public theology concentrates on this connection between faith and our shared social and cultural systems. And it aims to investigate both aspects of this phenomenon: the way that faith can become toxic and be used to destroy life, and the way that it can be implemented positively to significantly enhance life for all.

The use of religious resources for the active enhancement of life can be seen in many areas. In this course, specific attention will be given to political and economic crises. This course will (1) introduce students to the core principles and methodology of an engaged public theology; examine concrete case studies of theology in the public sphere during (2) times of political and (3) economic crises. These concrete case studies will give students an appreciation of the power of theology to harm but also enhance life.

At the end of this course, students will:

1. have a good working knowledge of the critical discourse between theology and politics and economics;
2. understand and develop theological perspectives on current political and economic challenges;
3. be able to express coherently their own views on the interrelation between theology and the public sphere;
4. understand the way in which church organizations can be involved in constructive social critique;
5. be able to use historical examples to develop their own models for modern social reconstruction;
6. have basic firsthand experience of performing theology in the public sphere;
7. know how to develop their own concrete projects that work toward the enhancement of life in their own contexts.

## **Assessment:**

2 Newspaper/Blog/Facebook posts (20%)

1 Book Review (40%)

1 Research Paper (40%)

## **Core Texts:**

Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (London: SCM, 1999). [Chinese Edition]

Welker, M. and J. Lam (eds.), *Political and Public: Western and Chinese Theological Discourse* (Hong Kong: Logos and Pneuma Press, 2014). [Chinese Edition]

Additional Texts for Individual Topics:

- Cheng, T.-J., D.A. Brown (eds.), *Religious Organizations and Democratization* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2006).
- Conradie, E., (ed.), *Collected Essays in Public Theology – Dirk Smit* (Stellenbosch, S.A.: Sun Press; 2007).
- Diamond, L., M.F. Plattner, P.J. Costopolous (eds.), *World Religions and Democracy* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2005).
- Elshtain, J.B., *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).
- Graham, E., and P. M. Scott (eds.), 'Special Issue: Public Theology and the City: Urban Theology as Public Theology', *International Journal of Public Theology* 2/1 (2008).
- de Gruchy, J.W., *Christianity and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- Gutierrez, G., *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (London: SCM, 1983).
- Haire, J., 'Public Theology – a Purely Western Issue? Public Theology in the Praxis of the Church in Asia', *C T C Bulletin: Bulletin of the Program Area on Faith, Mission and Unity (Theological Concerns)*, *Christian Conference of Asia* 23/3 (2007): 48–61.
- Hansen, L., (ed.), *Christians in Public: Aims, Methodologies and Issues in Public Theology* (Beyers Naudé Centre Series on Public Theology, vol. 3. Stellenbosch, S.A.: Sun Press, 2008).
- Harries, R., S. Platten (eds.), *Reinhold Niebuhr and Contemporary Politics: God and Power* (Oxford: OUP, 2010).
- Koopman, N., 'Public Theology as Prophetic Theology: More than Utopianism and Criticism', *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 134 (July 2009): 117–130.
- Koopman, N., 'The reception of the Barmen Declaration in South Africa', *The Ecumenical Review* 61/1 (2009): 60–71.
- Koopman, N., 'Reformed Theology in South Africa. Black? Liberative? Public?', *Journal for Reformed Theology* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2007), 294–306.
- Koopman, N., 'Public Theology in South Africa: A Trinitarian Approach', *International Journal of Public Theology* 1/2 (2007): 188–209.
- Kuo, C.-T., *Religion and Democracy in Taiwan* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008).
- Moltmann, J., *Ethics of Hope* (London: SCM, 2012).
- Pearson, C., 'The Public Comeback of God', in *Reimagining God and Mission: Perspectives from Australia* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2007), pp. 83–98.
- Schüssler Fiorenza, F., "Prospects for Political Theology in the Face of Contemporary Challenges", in F. Schüssler Fiorenza et al., *Politische Theologie: Neuere Geschichte und Poteziale* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2011), 41–64.
- Schmitt, C., *Political Theology* (1934. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).
- Smit, D., *Essays in Public Theology. Collected Essays 1* (Stellenbosch: Sun, 2007).
- Smit, D., 'Notions of the Public and Doing Theology', *International Journal of Public Theology* 1/3–4 (2007): 431–454.
- Smit, D., 'Reformed Faith, Justice and the Struggle Against Apartheid,' *Reformed World* 55/4 (2005): 355–368.
- Stackhouse, M., *Public Theology and Political Economy: Christian Stewardship in Modern Society* (Eerdmans, 1987; Reprinted, University Press of America, 1991).
- Stackhouse, M., 'Reflections on How and Why We Go Public', *International Journal of Public Theology* 1/3–4 (2007): 421–430.
- Storrar, W., A. Morton (eds.), *Public Theology for the 21st Century* (London: T & T Clark: 2004).
- Thomson, H., 'Stars and Compasses: Hermeneutical Guides for Public Theology', *International Journal of Public Theology* 2/1 (2008): 258–276.
- Villa-Vicencio, C., *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation Building and Human Rights* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992).

**Course Outline:**

Note: The content of the course may be adjusted during semester to meet student needs.

Session	Content
1	<b><u>Part I: Introduction and Guiding Principles</u></b> 1. Doing Theology in the Open: Introduction and Methodology
2	2. Jürgen Moltmann: Eschatology and Social Reform
3 & 4	<b><u>Part II: Theology in Times of Political Crisis</u></b> 1. Theo-Politics: Totalitarianism, Sovereignty, and the Deification of Culture and the State (Hegel, Barth, and Schmitt)
5 & 6	2. Terrorism and Religious Violence: Principles and History
7	3. The Barmen Confession
8	5. The Belhar Confession
9	6. The Confession of the Presbyterian Church of Taiwan
10	7. Global Christianity and International Peace Structures
11	<b><u>Practical Training: Enhancing Life Programmes</u></b> How to prepare a practical research project
12	<b><u>Part III: Theology in Times of Economic Crisis</u></b> 1. Poverty and Liberation Theology
13	2. Thomas Chalmers: Theology, Economy, and the “Unworthy Poor” in the UK
14	3. Political, Judicial and Economic Corruption
15	4. Globalization: Economic and Cultural Systems